

# Radicals, rebels and maybe beyond

Social Movements, Women's Leadership and the  
Web 2.0 in the Italian Political Sphere

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- 1. The archipelago of social movements:  
indistinct but with a strong identity**



In recent years, the literature on movements for global justice has greatly expanded, together with the empirical research carried out on collective entities, which are extraordinarily vivacious and differentiated. The turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century highlighted the functional link between the growth of globalization, the defeat of so-called “real socialism” and the affirmation of neoliberal ideology.<sup>1</sup>

The social pressures that ensued— from the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999 to the “Occupy Wall Street” and other similar

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<sup>1</sup> Neoliberal ideology has curiously stood up well to criticism - despite the objective policy failures arising from it. Colin Crouch (2011) describes this very well, noting that unlike classical liberalism, in which the consumer seemed to be the central hub of the market, for neoliberalism, the basic core is represented by the shareholders and by the investment of large firms. This explains the need, according to the neoliberal approach, to avoid interference from the State: *“the principal tenet of neoliberalism is that optimal outcomes will be achieved if the demand and supply for goods and services are allowed to adjust to each other through the price mechanism, without interference by government or other forces—though subject to the pricing and marketing of oligopolistic corporations”* (Crouch 2011, 17). This trend (as noted by many authors: Streeck 2011, della Porta 2013) leads to lack of responsibility on the part of representative institutions in not meeting the demands of citizens. The final outcome is a crisis of legitimacy both for the representative institutions and for politics in general.

movements - highlighted a decisive change in the way citizens “found a voice”. The growth of social movements in the past fifteen years does not follow – except, sometimes, in some of their outward forms – the organizational logic or kind of political intervention of the youth movements of the late 1960s. At the same time, social movements (and in particular those for global justice) show substantial differences compared with workers movements, even when their demands for greater social equality may appear similar in part.

The new movements do in fact have peculiar characteristics. In terms of social demands, they do not call for a structural change in economic models; very often, street demonstrators are asking for an opportunity to use their skills (often neglected by the labour market) and the right to decent wages in a fairer economic framework. In terms of political demands, however, the new movements are calling for a redefinition of democracy itself, which - as noted by Joseph Stiglitz (2012, 21) - people and not money must be put at the heart of the social framework. In other words, we are talking about a different dynamic from that of a part of the European working tradition. The new movements are certainly sensitive to the prospect of redistribution in the context of a substantial change in capitalism, but did not intend to call into question the legitimacy of liberal democracy.

These are, of course, generalizations. In fact, if we carefully study the social movements of the last fifteen years, we discover a very abundant and highly differentiated archipelago, both from the point of view of their proposals and in terms of their organizational logic. It is no coincidence that the first problem for the researcher is to define what a social movement is, in the light of the empirical observation of reality.

Social movements can be defined using at least four variables (Rucht 2003; 2006). The first is *organization*: in this framework, the movements are studied and defined on the basis of how they are organized and their own specific capacity to mobilize. The second variable is *interactions*, i.e. the specificity of a movement is represented by how well organized and efficient its processes are and, therefore, by its ability "to challenge power." The third variable is *symbolic* and, specifically, is a movement's ability to present itself as a *collective identity*. Lastly, the fourth variable lies in its *ideological narrative*, that relates to the specific political content with a particular goal (as, for example, the idea of a better world, an egalitarian society, and so on).<sup>2</sup>

In reality, movements of recent years seem to elude one-dimensional definitions. Our research, for example, showed that different variables can be present simultaneously, especially for movements which use the web as one of their places to connect, organize and define themselves. In this regard, it is useful to note that as early as 2006, Dieter Rucht thought it was impossible to use only one conceptual dimension to describe and analyse the specifics of movements. For Rucht (2006, 43), we can only speak of social movements when a series of qualities coexists: "in structural terms, social movements are networks of groups and/or organizations; as regards their aims, they are attempting to change society from the foundations (including the structure of power and basic values) or to resist such changes; in practical terms, protest is a key resource for social movements to present themselves to

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<sup>2</sup> A more in-depth analysis of the possible classification of social movements can be found in della Porta & Diani 2006.

the public, challenge their opponents and reinforce their collective identity”.

In other words, social movements differ from specific organizations or political campaigns on specific and/or “cause-oriented themes”; and they are obviously completely different from non-structured collective behaviour (like, for example, behaviour stemming from current populist sentiment). To put it another way, social movements have social change as their main aim and not simply the adoption of specific public policies. In reality, however, many of the social movements formed in Italy following the 2008 economic crisis, encompass the demand for macrosocial change and detailed proposals for specific policies. This further complicates the picture. In this situation, studying the dynamics of communication within/coming from the movements and the emergence of “community” leaders becomes more difficult but, at the same time, it helps us to define these movements: a definition made not only in terms of how they are organized but also one that is able to penetrate the shared culture of proposals and of political actions.



## **2. Internal democracy: deliberative processes and the logic of participation**



The way movements communicate therefore constitutes a strategic asset: communication is not, in fact, just an organizational tool but it forms the “cultural” procedure through which the forms of participatory democracy are triggered. We are dealing here with a model that is completely different from those of the liberal democracies, at least from those resulting from the affirmation of neoliberal conceptions, which are based on an elitist vision of political participation (Crouch 2003). In this situation, the parties have lost their ability to select the ruling classes and political participation itself does not pass through those “who see their associative and social activity in political life being greatly reduced” (Pizzorno 1996, 1028). In this situation, dangerous strategies of political personalization have been formed, including as a response to the processes of ideological dealignment and to the crisis of confidence in the parties and in their social role (Sorice 2011). The communicative space (firstly in broadcasting but later on the web) becomes a public space in which the identification of the (often populist) leader with the voters is created and finds its own privileged space. The crisis of liberal democracy – exacerbated by the processes of neoliberal

globalization – facilitates the appeal to a Machiavellian “prince”. In this situation, social movements have activated forms of organization based on the need to go beyond the logic of the delegation of power. In other words, *representation* is put into question because it is not thought to be able to rebalance the inequalities of power and the forms of social injustice.

The rejection of delegation sometimes leads towards shifts in which the rhetoric of *direct democracy* becomes functional to the emergence of a paternalistic kind of leadership, as happened – according to many scholars – in the case of the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (the “Five Star Movement”), whose parliamentary institutionalization coincided, in practice, with the revelation of a substantial internal democratic deficit (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2013; Laudonio & Panarari 2014; Sorice 2013).

However, the main characteristic of the social movements formed after the 2008 crisis is to be found precisely in their adoption of a *deliberative-participatory democracy* model<sup>3</sup> that

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<sup>3</sup> On this occasion, we have decided to pursue the conceptual problem of the substantial difference between deliberative democracy and participatory democracy. The former, as we know, seems to have more obvious normative and prescriptive worth, and would highlight strong adherence to procedural and methodological aspects. Basically, the procedural aspect takes precedence over the outcome of the process. On the other hand, the *dialectic based on rational argument between the participants* (the principle of deliberation), seems to be moved by an ethical perspective more than a functional one. Participatory democracy, instead, appears to be more concerned with *decision making*. In other words, “participatory democracy [...] uses different techniques of expression, such as the explicit affirmation of conflict, the demonstration of feelings, giving evidence, exclamation, passwords and, among the material manifestations, besides working groups and negotiating tables, it can also contemplate large meetings and protest marches as well, and other public demonstrations” (Allegretti 2009). Deliberation is still not necessarily a democratic process (Gelli & Morlino 2008) while the logic of participation is configured as a process driven by

is not comparable in any way to direct democracy. As we know, deliberative democracy is based on the idea that the preferences of social actors can change during the course of the interaction (Dryzek 2000; della Porta 2011). Deliberation “is based on horizontal communication flows, multiple producers of content, many occasions for interaction, confrontation on the basis of rational arguments and a propensity to listen to the other side. In this sense, deliberative democracy is discursive” (della Porta 2011, 83). From this perspective, the communicative force is not determined by how it is organized but it is the main element giving structure to the motivation for political action. It is no coincidence, as said on several occasions by Donatella della Porta (2005; 2011; 2013), that a deliberative democracy should be mainly based on consensual practices, in which leaving behind individual egoism is a precondition (Arendt 1991) and solidarity has a real value in the implementation of the programme. Deliberative and participatory democracy – in other words – goes beyond the idea of the bourgeois public sphere in favour of a broader consideration of an alternative public sphere in which the mechanisms of deliberation come into effect (della Porta 2005). Social movements move precisely in these alternative public spheres, which allow citizens to experience new forms of participation, within an inclusive political logic.

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egalitarian democracy. Here, nevertheless, we have chosen not to proceed to a careful analysis of a conceptual nature, favouring instead an empirical perspective: in this framework, deliberative and participatory democracy is not only a juxtaposition of two different processes but a conception in which the dynamics of accepted and managed conflict move within endogenous identities.

*Participatory Deliberative Democracy is one of the four models of democracy, proposed by Donatella della Porta (2013, 8). It finds its place in the frame of managed conflict, which is opposite to the consensus-based models (that very often are responsible of the crisis of democracy).<sup>4</sup>*

Majority vote		Deliberation
Delegation	Liberal Democracy	Liberal Deliberative Democracy (radical)
Participation	Radical, Participatory Democracy	Participatory Deliberative Democracy

Tab. 1 Conceptions of democracy. Source: della Porta 2013, 8

The social movements we have studied are those which developed in response to the crisis of legitimacy of institutional politics, which followed the economic crisis. From this perspective, therefore, not only the “anti-austerity” movements (and, by extension, anti-liberal movements, even if the two do not always coincide), but also those movements that have taken on the task of redressing the problems within the parties and institutional political organizations; this leads to a very

<sup>4</sup> About these questions, see: della Porta 2013; Papadopoulos 2013; De Blasio 2014; Sorice 2014.

heterogeneous (and at the moment still to be conclusively defined) body of groupings, whose interests range from “gender empowerment” - such as the *Se non ora quando* (*If not now, when?*) group to the socially-committed networks, such as that for fair trade, which use the expression “rebellious by doing” to identify their own line of action, and which we could define as political but not aligned with a specific and strategic political goal. We have concentrated, in particular, on the emergence of a kind of leadership we have defined as “community leaderships” and which obviously have characteristics that differ partly from the traditional forms of political leadership.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In a previous study, we brought to light leadership styles that are “shared” and/or “community-led”, attributing them with the predominant characteristic of being horizontal as regards their communication (dialogue relationship) in terms of exchanges between the members of the reference group. On this subject, cf. De Blasio, Hibberd, Higgins, Sorice (2012).





### **3. Participation and community leadership**



The “new” communication technologies (in particular the web 2.0) constitute an important set of tools and, at the same time, a symbolic representative space for the development and affirmation of new social movements. We certainly cannot say that the internet is responsible for the growth of the movements, just as we cannot say that social media alone can “make” a revolution (Gerbaudo 2012). At the same time, however, we cannot but recognize the growing importance of the web (and, more generally, of the media) in the development of new forms of democracy.

The media – as correctly noted by Donatella della Porta (2013) – “are certainly important for social movements” and, besides, pluralism in and of the media can facilitate the participation of disadvantaged groups, which constitute an important indicator in the study of the quality of democracy (Morlino 2011; De Blasio & Sorice 2013).

In recent years, much research has concentrated on the relationship between the media and democracy. What is more, democratic institutions have been considered as independent variables, while the debate on the democratic potential of the internet is still confined to the study of technological variables.

Our research approach tries to change these perspectives, offering a holistic view. It is no coincidence that “research on alternative media has instead focused attention on social movements as agents of democratic communication following participatory and deliberative visions of democracy” (della Porta 2013, 90). We have therefore chosen to study social movements as *agents of democratic communication*. In other words, we have chosen to conceive of social movements as spaces for networking, including the gaining of experience both in international events such as the World Social Forum and in more specific Italian contexts, which are capable of adopting a fully-fledged model of internal democracy that we could define as the “open space method”. As also noted by Donatella della Porta, “in recent reflections linking communication and participatory democratic quality, the focus of attention is not so much (or no longer) on the abstract ‘power of the media’, but more on the relations between media and publics: the ways in which ‘people exercise their agency in relation to media flows’ (Couldry 2006, 27). Media practices therefore become central, not only as the practices of the media actors, but more broadly as what various actors do in relations with the media, including activists’ media practices” (della Porta 2013, 92).

Therefore we chose to study the sphere of the media and, in particular, the space provided by the web both in specific platforms for participation and in “open” discussions within blogs and on official Facebook pages. In reality, our project is broader and overall it covers:

- a) the analysis of the web presence of some social movements formed in Italy after the economic crisis that began in 2008;

- b) the analysis of the deliberative mechanisms within internet platforms for democratic participation online, through participatory observation online (in the framework of “virtual ethnography”);
- c) the formation of four focus groups made up of individuals who mainly participate online and/or as “spectators”;
- d) some semi-structured interviews of privileged and/or significant witnesses;
- e) the analysis of the relationships and disputes in the local groups of social movements, done by participatory observation<sup>6</sup> and the formation of some focus groups, concentrating in particular on the role of women;
- f) the analysis of the control of the information and discussion on Twitter, limited to the movements (and/or those recognizable as “exponents” of such movements).

The research is still in progress and here we only provide a first step of our work, which will be soon updated. Here, anyway, we want to disseminate the first steps of our work.

In line with the young but well-established tradition of studies on movements, we believe that networks are an important way

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<sup>6</sup> On this point, we adopted a methodological approach similar to that described by Christopher Haug, Dieter Rucht and Simon Teune (2013). Thus we concentrated on “face-to-face meetings in which activists present political views, make claims, analyse problems, exchange information, carry out and solve conflicts, and take explicit or implicit decisions” (Haug, Rucht & Teune 2013, 23-24). We think it is worth noting that the observation protocol does include however a quantitative component in which we codified the temporal variables, the number of participants, conflict resolution modes, and the role of women in dispute and/or decision-making dynamics. In particular we tried to identify the emergence of specific roles (leadership or problem-solving) on the part of women. This aspect of the research – as previously mentioned – is still under preparation and will be presented later.

for people to participate (della Porta & Diani 2006). Networks today are constituted both by relationships between individuals who share places and modes of social and political commitment and by the web (no longer identifiable as disconnected from off-line experience but possibly as a place to confirm and continue the experience, in some cases even to activate commitment).

Analysing the web presence of movements, we decided to take a general perspective, focusing on the different contexts of “protest” in society, although we are well aware of the wide variety of contexts under analysis. In this segment of our research, we tried to identify the emergence of community leadership, which in some cases we observed flanking (and sometimes opposing) “vertical” and/or “charismatic” leadership (which, in theory, should not be easy to find in movements structured within the logic of deliberative and participatory democracy).<sup>7</sup>

An important aspect of the emergence of community leadership is precisely the role of women and, in particular, the affirmation of women in leadership positions. Please note that we are not saying that the web is a place where it is easier for women to be empowered, about which, furthermore, many scholars have expressed serious concerns.<sup>8</sup> There are, however,

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<sup>7</sup> These are, however, exceptions – at least in the groups we studied – which do not constitute, in our opinion, significant evidence.

<sup>8</sup> As for the web, the situation is rather curious. On the one hand, gender stereotypes are present to the same extent as in broadcast media; what is more, according to several studies, stereotypes could be even stronger due to fewer filters for blogs, online newspapers (especially small and medium-sized ones), and social networks (Lawrence, Rose 2009). On the other hand, the increased presence of women online (both professional politicians and activists in movements) is encouraging the redefinition of themes and

some evident signs of the presence of women: on the one hand, the dynamics already present in institutionalized politics are proposed yet again, on the other, the logic of participatory deliberation seems to offer a different role to women. In other words, if in some contexts it is possible to encounter the difficulty of going beyond the logic of the double bind, in others, the discursive logic of deliberative dynamics facilitates the emergence of women as representatives of a kind of community leadership, which undoubtedly constitutes a new factor in the political practices of movements.

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languages which, albeit slowly, seem to be moving towards the elimination of sexist prejudices.

In this situation different actors have important functions: a) the media, which tend to reproduce consolidated social stereotypes, for the most part accepted as part of a hegemonic culture; b) parties and political organizations, which tend to select their ruling class (and their leaders in particular) in a fundamentally male-gender-based way; c) the popular culture that accepts gender stereotypes, finding them legitimized in media narratives; d) economic institutions, which tend to reproduce established models that are functional to social organization as it has been defined over time; and e) phenomena of the mediatization of politics, which tend to further legitimize the 'male' characteristics of executive leadership, effectively forcing women to adopt a male style or to face a difficult path to legitimacy.

At the moment the web - despite its tendentially horizontal nature and its participatory potential - cannot seem to reverse the processes in a decisive manner nor to represent a space in which to overcome the double bind effect (Campus 2010; De Blasio 2012). This is true even for women web users not only for women involved in politics. It is not surprising that the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) has found that women seem to prefer "indirect" political participation (forms of "access", in other words, that do not necessarily enter into the dynamics of participation and mobilization). On the difference between access and participation, cf. De Blasio 2008; Sorice 2009.





#### **4. Modes of participation: women's “place”**



There are no consolidated tools to analyse the role of women in the deliberative dynamics adopted by “civic engagement” groups and/or social movements. On the one hand, this is because the horizontal nature of community relations tends to mitigate the “gender gap”; on the other, because the methodological tools used up to now refer only to the traditional media and institutional politics (as, for example, in the case of female leadership of political parties). Concepts such as *critical mass* or *substantive representation*,<sup>9</sup> for

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<sup>9</sup> One of the concepts most commonly used in the analysis of the representation of women in politics is that of *critical mass*. The concept of critical mass has been widely used in studies on the representation of women in elected assemblies: in practice - and simplifying - it maintains that a very large number of women would favour more awareness of the issues and problems of women, since the physical presence of women is able to dictate the political agenda. Recently, the concept of critical mass has been strongly contested, starting with the analysis of the relationship between the percentage of women in parliamentary assemblies and the adoption of laws useful for women. In practice, it is argued that not only has this causal relationship not been demonstrated but it even appears to be misleading.

The debate on the “critical mass” of women and politics developed from the works of two important scholars: Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977a , 1977b)

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and Drude Dahlerup (1988). The works studied the experiences of women who made up small minorities organized in business and political contexts. In reality, the initial analysis focused on how women responded and acted in situations of exclusion. However, the works of Kanter and Dahlerup noted, among other things, that the same experiences of responding to being sidelined were strongly influenced by an increase in the number of women. The pioneering studies of Kanter and Dahlerup received several criticisms; on the one hand, because they did not take into account certain aspects (such as, for example, the role, function and strategies of men in elected assemblies), and on the other, they did not always demonstrate the causal relationship between the increase in the number of women and the growth of approval for the adoption of specific policies for women. An initial review of the critical mass theory shifted attention away from the relationship between the number of women and the number of legislative measures towards the study of how a greater number of women could manage to create alliances more easily and thus promote the adoption of policies useful to the women themselves. At the same time, however, even the earliest reviews of the theory (from the late 1980s to the early 1990s) recognized the importance of the number of presences in certain public places (exactly like elected assemblies).

In the second half of the 1990s, much more controversial approaches developed towards the critical mass theory. In particular, cases were highlighted of political failures arising from the existence of a nevertheless considerable critical mass. Many cases were studied in which an increase in the number of women in parliaments (10-40 % growth) did not correspond to any real changes in policy or to a change of direction towards the adoption of "female gendered" policies (Childs 2004; Grey 2002; Towns 2003).

Scholars – men and women - who adopted a more critical approach to the theory, highlighted the need to consider other variables that accompany (and sometimes influence) the variable related to the number of women: links to a political party, cultural affiliations, legislative inexperience (Cowley, Childs 2003), and external constraints such as the electoral system ( Tremblay 2003). In other words, the number of women in elected assemblies (and institutions) is an important factor as long as we take into consideration its interactions with the other variables internal and external to the political sphere.

According to Childs and Krook (2006b), the interpretations of the critical mass theory (which, according to the two scholars are sometimes inconsistent) constitute the conceptual basis for the spread of "gender quotas" in many countries around the world.

example, do not seem entirely suitable for the study of phenomena such as social movements, their online presence and their organizational dynamics.

The nature of social movements - and their web presence - clearly rules out methods of analysis deriving from the *critical mass* approach. However, some useful analytical elements can be found by revisiting approaches focused on *substantive representation*, which allow a micro-social type of analysis. In this perspective (where the research is focused not only on women but also on the relationship between men, as a group, and women, also as a group), the theme of *responsiveness*

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In recent years, the idea of the *critical mass* has been partially superseded by the concept of *substantive representation*. In practice, this transition of the theory follows a path from the study of “when women make a difference” to the analysis of how substantive representation is achieved. This conceptual passage is a *de facto* transition from the macro- to the micro-social. In this perspective, the research is focused not only on women but also on the relations between men (as a group) and women (also as a group).

Substantive representation puts into play, among other things, the important theme of *responsiveness* (Morlino 2008; 2011): substantive representation is in fact defined as the action carried out by the representatives according to the needs of those represented, in a dimension of responsiveness.

Recently theoretical approaches have been developed that avoid contrasting the theory of critical mass with that of the substantive representation of women. However, these approaches call for a meeting between the two theoretical approaches, including in consideration of the fact that the adoption of a real policy “for women” must bear in mind how the “substantive” actors could interact with the critical mass.

In this direction, there was a very interesting study on the presence of women in the Scottish Parliament carried out by Paul Chaney (2012). Chaney’s analysis is also an interesting case from the methodological point of view; in fact the research combined discourse and content analyses to produce a comparative analysis.

(Morlino 2008; 2011) does not end with the action carried out “by the representatives according to the needs of those represented” but is realized in the capacity of women to become hubs of meaningful relationships and agents of dispute resolution (in the groups).

In this regard, we did not detect an increasing trend in the indices of deliberation on the web, where gender differences tend to be cancelled (at least in the Italian case). However, we are finding – and especially today - a significant difference between men and women in the Index of Deliberation Quality as presented in the analysis of groups.<sup>10</sup> In other words, women seem to have a greater capacity for community leadership in dispute resolution and management of the deliberative processes in group relations; the same dynamic, however, is not currently found on the web.

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<sup>10</sup> We have used the Index of Deliberative Quality (IDQ), in the same way as other researchers; here, in particular, we decided to use it according to the approach proposed in della Porta & Rucht (2013). The IDQ “is a 12-point scale, (0) = low deliberative quality, (12) = high deliberative quality”. It consists of other indicators (Type of power, Reciprocity, Symmetry, Co-operation, Atmosphere, Incivility) measured on a three-level scale.

5. **“Rebel by doing”. The experience of *Comune-Info* beyond radicalism and rebellion**





Here we will briefly present one of the “case histories” we are studying - that of a communication platform whose main aim is to give a voice to forms of “alternative information” and to movements that identify with the “rebel by doing” idea, i.e. political engagement that is not limited to demonstrations and/or forms of public protest but is strongly focused on the dynamics of “civic engagement”. The Italian website “Comune-Info.net” functions as a site for information and the activation of political action, and as a support network for many movements that we can include among those formed at the time of the crisis of the legitimization of institutional politics.

We put some questions to Monica Di Sisto, vice-president of “Fair-Watch”, an association that is very active in assisting social movements and that promotes, with others, the work of Comune-Info.net. First of all, we asked what drove them to set up a communication platform like *Comune-Info*.

“In the face of forced eviction by the city’s institutions of the experience promoted by the previous city council called “City of the Other Economy”, some smaller organizations that had

promoted it (Reorient, FairWatch, and La Strada) decided to preserve the heritage of relationships and good practices developed online in the preceding years, constructing a small “City of common goods”, which was rebellious and talked with all those common goods’ rebels who resisted evictions, commercialization, and expropriation of the rights to solidarity and shared citizenship. And so an editorial plan was born, leading to a website around which a community was formed and which is today an association – *Persone Comune* (“Common People”) with an intense and political relationship system. It comes under private law, actually it is clandestine, but with a public profile, distinctly in the public interest, I would say”.

The testimony of Monica Di Sisto goes on to talk about the aims of Comune-Info.net and whether it has a political “outcome”:

“To our great surprise, it has: we have over forty thousand unique visitors a week, coming from all over Italy (and beyond, despite the site being mainly written in Italian), and they participate actively, representing their struggles and their alternatives directly on our pages, bypassing any journalistic mediation and telling their own stories. They often ask us for help: they want to know how to connect with similar struggles, they react if they feel some issues have been badly or too superficially dealt

with. The most active participants are: *Distretto 42 di Pisa*, the *No Muos*, the *No Tav*, Italian factories that have been reclaimed, for example *Re-Maflow*, the new *STOP TTIP* campaign, *Genuino clandestino*, groups supporting ecological and social urban renewal, and the *Ecosolpop* solidarity markets.<sup>11</sup> They all openly identify themselves and provide informative material, but they also provide small amounts of funding as do very many readers - readers who are impoverished but who are extraordinarily supportive."

We also asked about the meaning of their slogan "Rebel by doing". Note how the emphasis is on proactive political action, in a kind of welding between pre-political vocation and "civic engagement":

"For us, rebelling is not just about complaining or shouting, but about changing the everyday things, within our reach, to train ourselves in changing the system, which is what, in our opinion, many very small citizens of the world are doing together, in small doses, in small ways, in dignified and precious silence. We asked our readers if any of them wanted to tell us how they *rebel by doing*, and if you take a look at the website, you will find extraordinary

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<sup>11</sup> Monica Di Sisto cites here some basic examples in Italy of movements but also groups and a social self-defence organization. Some of these are initiatives with a specific aim and, therefore, strictly speaking they should not be considered as movements, at least not according to the more traditional definitions.

replies. There are mothers, knife sharpeners, gardeners, intellectuals, people keeping their businesses – and others their minds - open, people who keep children's dreams alive by telling them stories, people who keep us alive by collecting the waste on the ground and in the fields. Life is more beautiful, rebellion is intense, the world is better, starting with ourselves."

About the women's role, the testimony of Monica Di Sisto moves in line with our observation:

"In the territorial groups of social movements, women are not only the executive guides of their organizations or better self-organizations, but very often they are also formally at the helm of their groups, because they manage a power that men considered too small to be really prestigious. Another situation is related to the occurrence of these realities on the sidelines or in the occurrence of very everyday problems – such as incinerators, landfills, water, urban agriculture, unemployment, violence – that are closer to the care dimension, health, life, and the territory that are often delegated to the women. From victims to leaders of themselves the step is frequently forced."

Moreover, as Donatella della Porta (2013, 10) stated, "the feminist critique of Habermas has, in act, stressed the

importance of looking not only outside public institutions, but also beyond a mass mediatic public sphere, creating places in which the weakest groups in particular can be empowered". Exactly in the participatory and deliberative spaces, the conflictual place of the public sphere also becomes the territory in which collective identities are formed.



## **6. Conclusions**





**W**e believe that the attempt to combine the analysis of deliberative practices in the movements, their online presence and role of women constitutes an important and perhaps significant opportunity for social and political research. The data collected so far - though partial - show the need to continue on this path. We are confident that we can improve and complete this project, which, in our opinion, also has value as a contribution to the expansion and increase in the quality of democracy.



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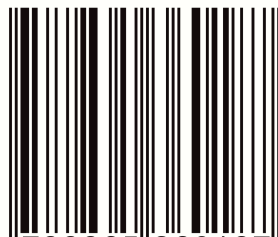
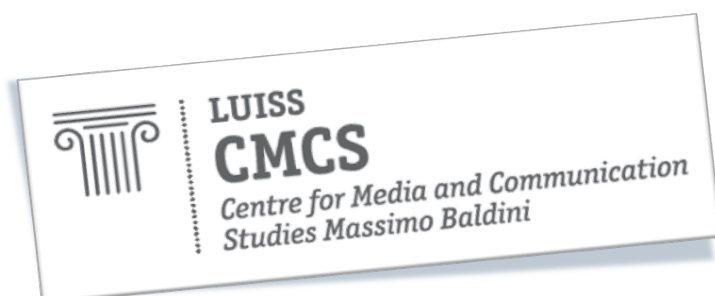
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## Radicals, rebels and maybe beyond.

### Social Movements, Women's Leadership and the Web 2.0 in the Italian Political Sphere

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